

Crisis in Syria

Syria has in the course of the last two-and-a-half years become the scene of killings and violence done by the opposing parties and thus turning Syria into a land without peace after having been a symbol of peace and security.

The battle of our city Aleppo began on 19 July 2012 as a part of the Syrian civil war. The clashes escalated in late July in Aleppo, Syria's largest city which is of great strategic and economic importance. The battle's scale and its importance led combatants to name it the "Mother of All Battles".

As the conflict has expanded across Aleppo thousands of people have been struggling to preserve their safety and their livelihoods and the number of people in dire need has been increasing very rapidly. The previously well-functioning health system has collapsed; food shortages are commonplace, water and electricity supply are disrupted. Medical aid brought in is being targeted, hospitals destroyed and medical personnel captured. Not to forget that 90 % of all medical personnel have left the city. Thievery has increased, with criminals robbing houses and stores. Rates of kidnappings have also increased. You might have heard of the kidnapping of the two Arch-Bishops of Aleppo, but there are hundreds of victims from before and after. The number of jobless people is increasing rapidly. Food and fuel prices have risen in such a way that there is less and less demand for items on sale. Yes, the economy is clearly in decline. Due to the on-going siege on the city people cannot travel or drive outside Aleppo, not even one kilometer. The international airport of Aleppo has been closed since the beginning of January 2013. In a normal situation all these facilities are needed to make the communities thrive and enable them to turn the wheels of the economy and move forward to more and more freedom and independence.

But instead much the buildings of Aleppo's most-populous streets now lie in ruin, and lives are torn apart by a seemingly endless barrage of missiles, bombs, mortars, and tank shells.

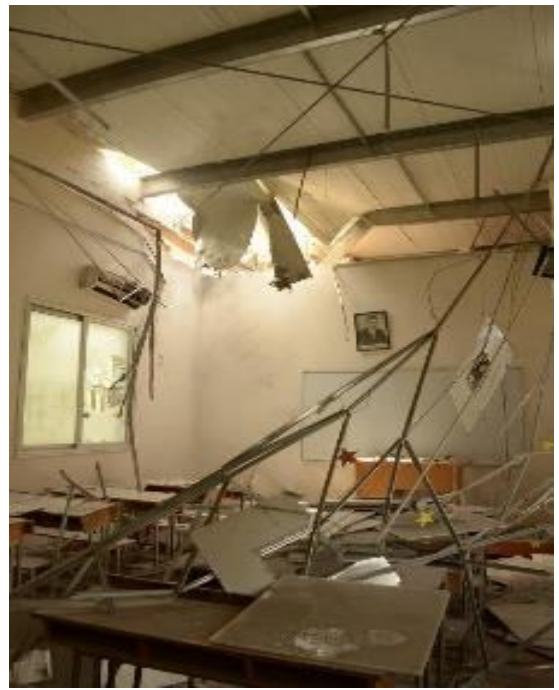






Many people are suffering from various diseases because of the daily fear of rockets and missiles being showered upon them. They are also suffering from trauma having lost family members and relatives to the mortars and shells hitting randomly but everywhere at just any hour of the day and night. On the 24th of May, 2013 three missiles hit the Armenian Evangelical Bethel School building just 15 meters away from the parsonage of the church where we live, and the roof of the school building was badly damaged. The school was hit for the second time on the 12th of September and on the 22nd of September a third shell fell in the school yard but fortunately did not explode.





Students easily could see this last one fall from the sky as they were sitting in their class-rooms.

In spite of all the missile attacks, the Armenian Evangelical schools in the city are "swimming against the flow", as we say in Armenian, not allowing the fear and the uncertainty hijack our hope and firm will to live. This year the Armenian Evangelical Bethel Secondary School are happy to have 350 students from KG to the 12th Grade. The number of active teachers for the school-year 2013-2014 is 40. The school always offers a highly qualified education with an academically approved program. It is worthwhile to mention that the ministry of Education in Aleppo has presented a letter of appreciation to Bethel School for its high academic standard in this city of war.





In spite of these difficult conditions, our churches are still functioning just like before and all schools are up and running. The nine churches of the Armenian Evangelical Community in Syria, which are the Armenian Evangelical Bethel Church, the Armenian Evangelical Emmanuel Church, the Armenian Evangelical Martyr's Church, the Armenian Evangelical Church of Christ, the Syriac Evangelical Church as well as the four Armenian Evangelical Kessab Churches are actively responding to the needs of their communities according to the means at hand. As the pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Bethel Church, I would like to give you some information about the church activities and social works that have been administered at the church since July 2012. Armenian Evangelical Bethel Church continues its Sunday and weekly communal worship and meetings in the followings domains: Sunday school, Youth, Junior High Group, "Armiss" Conservatory, and the Women's Communal Worship Group. Throughout all these, we have clearly felt the guidance of our Lord as we continuously put ourselves at His service. We want to mention with great joy that more than 400 individuals attend the church's Sunday Worship Service.





Considering this inhumane and sad situation the Armenian Evangelical Bethel Church has established a polyclinic to serve the Armenian community regardless of denominational affiliation by assisting those in need of medical care, and especially trying to help patients with chronic diseases in need of long-time medical assistance.



Our people will continue to work and pray for peace and safety. They will continue preparing for a good future for their children. Syria was in the past a beacon of light and we have great hopes that it will once more be one in the future as well with continuous co-existence, which has been one of the pillars of our nation. We, as the Armenian Community in Syria, will remain faithful and will keep our houses, churches, and organizations alive. The source of strength is not in ourselves: it is God himself. We do not survive under this tremendous pressure by focusing on surviving; and neither do we survive under this pressure by focusing on our own perceived strength. No, we survive under this pressure by keeping focused on God:

"...who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." - 2 Corinthians 1:4

Considering the priorities and today's basic needs of our people in different cities in Syria, especially in Aleppo we ask our dear friends, brothers and sisters, to extend helping hands, so that we can assist economically afflicted Syrian families by preparing food parcels to them, providing milk for their children, and providing more scholarship aid for the Armenian students, while providing medical assistance for the sick.

We deeply appreciate your prayers and efforts; it is a rare and special time for us as the Church of Syria to experience the true oneness of the body of Christ all over the globe, as we all raise our Hands and Praise our God together for His Faithfulness to us at this time of trouble. Yes, this is our encouragement that we are all One in Him!

Yours Truly'

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